

Message Text

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ACTION PM-05

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-12 NEA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 ACDA-07

ERDA-05 ARA-10 CIAE-00 DODE-00 EA-07 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NASA-01 NSAE-00 NSC-05 OIC-02 SP-02 PA-01

PRS-01 OES-07 SS-15 USIA-06 MCT-01 AID-05 OMB-01

TRSE-00 /138 W

-----111292 190844Z /23

P R 181800Z JUL 77

FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7800

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY BAMAKO

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

USMISSION USUN NYK

CINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 1624

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, SS, MR

SUBJECT: SAHARA WATCH: JULY 16 ATTACK ON ZOUERATE AND NOUAKCHOTT ALERT

1. SIX MILITARY AND ONE CIVILIAN WERE KILLED AND SEVENTEEN WOUNDED IN POLISARIO SATURDAY (JULY 16) MORTAR ATTACK ON ZOUERATE IRON MINING CENTER. ACCORDING FRENCH EMBASSY, MILITARY CASUALTIES WERE HIT DURING SKIRMISH WITH WITHDRAWING ATTACK FORCE.

2. MILITARY AND SECURITY FORCES IN NOUAKCHOTT AREA WERE PUT ON ALERT NOON SUNDAY (JULY 17) IN RESPONSE REPORTED MORNING SIGHTING OF

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POLISARIO ATTACK FORCE WWST OF AKJOUJT (250 KILOMETERS NORTHEAST OF NOUAKCHOTT AT END OF PAVED HIGHWAY). MILITARY/SECURITY FORCES BUSTLED AROUND CAPITAL THROUGHOUT NOON AND EARLY EVENING. ALL UNNECESSARY CIVILIAN PERSONNEL WERE DISMISSED FROM AIRPORT AND TIGHT CONTROLS ESTABLISHED ON APPROACHES TO AIRPORT AND TAKE-OFF POINT OF AKJOUJT ROAD ON NORTHEAST SIDE OF CITY; MACHINE GUN CREWS DUG IN ON NORTH AND EASTERN PERIMETERS OF CAPITAL; MILITARY/SECURITY FORCES INITIATED ACTIVE MOBIL PATROLLING AND

SET UP ROAD BLOCKS TO CONTROL MOVEMENT AROUND CITY. RECONNAISSANCE AIRCRAFT SENT ALOFT DESPITE VIRUTALLY ZERO VISIBILITY OF VERY BAD SANDSTORM, AND TWO GROUND FORCES TEAMS WERE SENT NORTHWARD TO CHECK OUT CIVILIAN ATTACK REPORT. DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF TOLD EMBOFF LATE MONDAY MORNING (JULY 18) THAT AIR AND GROUND RECONNAISSANCE FORCES DESPTCHED TOWARD AKJOUJT TO AREA OF REPORTED SIGHTING FOUND NO EVIDENCE WHATSOEVER OF POLISARIO. DESPITE ACTIVE ASSISTANCE OF CIVILIAN WHO HAD REPORTED SEEING ATTACK FORCE, MAURITANIAN GROUND UNITS FOUND NO VEHICLES, NO ACTIVITY AND NO TRACKS. ALERT CANCELLED EARLY MONDAY MORNING. TROOPS HAVE RETURNED TO THEIR BARRACKS. ONLY REMAINING TRACE OF YESTERDAYS ALERT ARE CONTINUED TIGHT SECURITY MEASURES AT AIRPOGT.

3. COMMENT: IN SHARP CONTRAST TO JULY 3 INACTION, MAURITANIAN MILITARY/SECURITY AUTHORITIES REACTED QUICKLY, DECISIVELY, AND APPARENTLY EFFECTIVELY TO JULY 27 REPORT OF POLISARIO ACTIVITY. ACCORDING DEPUTY CS, AUTHORITIES WERE KEENLY AWARE OF AND RESPONDED TO NERVOUSNESS AND FEAR OF CAPITAL RESIDENTS DESPITE THEIR PROFESSIONAL MILITARY JUDGEMENT THAT ENEMY COULD NOT AND WOULD NOT ATTACK DURING SANDSTORM WHICH HID BOTH THEIR TARGETS AND DEFENDIMM UNITS. PRESSURE ON MILITARY TO ACT AFTER JULY 3 FIASCO, ESPECIALLY ON SUNDAY (USUAL MILITARY DAY OFF AND FAVORITE POLISARIO STRIKE DAY) WAS NOT EXPLICITLY ACKNOWLEDGED. COUPLING REPORUDNSIGHTING OF POLISARIO NEAR AKJOUJT WITH ZOUERATE
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ATTACK, YFRENCH EMBAO Y OFFICIALS NOTED POSSIBLIITY OF ZOUERATE STRIKE AS DIVERSIONARY TACTIC TO SHIELD SOUTHWARD TRAVERSE OF ATTACKING FORCE, AND ACCORDINGLY ADVISED FRENCH CITIZEN RESIDENTS, AND TRANSIENTS TO RETURN TO THEIR QUARTERS AND STAY THERE. FRENCH COMSULAR DECISION PLUS MAURITANIAN MILITARY ALERT TURNED JIET SUNDAY AFTERNOON INTO TENSE EIGHT HOURS FOR ALL THE INAHABITANTS OF SANDSVILLE.

HANDYSIDE

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Message Attributes

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Disposition Approved on Date:
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Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
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Disposition Reason:
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